

THE THREE LUCKY SWEDES: John Brynteson, Jafet Lindeberg, & Erik Lindblom

The Rush Is On!

History reveals that the largest and most successful gold rush stampede was started by the discovery of gold in Nome, Alaska in September 1898 by the three “Lucky Swedes”. The news of their discovery of coarse rich gold on Anvil Creek spread rapidly, and before long, a tent city had appeared on the golden beaches surrounding the mouth of the Snake River.

The Lucky Swedes, though lucky indeed, were not free of hardship and problems. They were constantly badgered by claim-jumpers and burdened by litigation from people of questionable morals, like those of the dishonest Federal Judge Noyes and his corrupt sidekick Alexander McKenzie. They quickly learned the importance of silence, and spoke only in a language that could not be understood by most when discussing their claims. Together, with their combination of mining experience and keen eye for business, they formed the Pioneer Mining Company which paid more than two million dollars in cash dividends from 1902-1912 and by the early 1920’s had taken more than \$20,000,000 in gold. These fortunate three, with the help of a few others, made a discovery that changed the Seward Peninsula forever.

John Brynteson (1871-1959)

On August 13, 1871, John Brynteson was born to a poor farming family in the historical mining district of Arternmark, Sweden and came to the United States at the age of 16. With minimal education, which was more than most could claim in those days, he journeyed to the upper peninsula of Michigan. For 7 years, he worked in copper and iron mines and eventually became an American citizen.

Looking for coal in the spring of 1898, Brynteson landed on the eastern coast of the Bering Sea’s Norton Sound at the village of Unalakleet with the Covenant Mission. The search for coal was futile and, together with Minister Nels Hultberg and a mining engineer known as “Blake”, he headed north to the Snake River area. Here the small mining party unearthed trace amounts of gold. So in mid-September, this time with newly formed partners and fellow Scandinavians Lindeberg and Lindblom, Brynteson returned. Within mere days, he and his partners knew they had discovered land with tremendous potential. They headed to the village of Golovin to collect supplies and recruit aid in forming the new mining district. GOLD! Brynteson and his partners struck it rich, and so the rush was on.

Brynteson became a very wealthy man. Edward Harrison wrote a brief biography of the three “Lucky Swedes” in which he wrote of John Brynteson: “While the product of his mines have made him a capitalist and placed him in a position of absolute financial independence, he still remains the unassuming man and courteous gentleman that he was before the days of his affluence.” He did not squander his newfound wealth, but instead invested it into other business ventures and charities. He established a home for sailors in San Francisco, California and contributed to various charities in Chicago, Illinois. On May 2, 1900, Brynteson married Emma Forsborg, with whom he had three children. He left Alaska, and eventually returned to his homeland. There he built factories that further contributed to his wealth. However, his charitable works were not entirely contributed to the United States; he also financed the construction of the Ice Palace in Stockholm, Sweden for the 1912 Olympic Games. Brynteson lived a long and fulfilled life and died in Sweden an honored citizen in 1959.

Jafet Lindeberg (1874-1962)

Jafet Lindeberg was born in 1874 in the far north of Norway in Baddeven. Lindeberg's father, Frederick Kristian, was a farmer and a fisherman who came to Baddeven from the ancient mining region the valley of Norrbotn. Though not Saami, nomadic reindeer herders of northern Europe, the Lindeberg family had a background in Reindeer herding, as did many people from the region. Lindeberg's family claimed to descend from the Walloons, Belgians who traveled to northern Scandinavia in the 1700's to mine and smelt copper and iron ore. Jafet Lindeberg's uncle was employed at a copper mine at the nearby town of Kofjord and frequently took young Jafet on weekend prospecting excursions. One of Lindeberg's teachers, a man named Hansen, made sure that Lindeberg was educated in English, French, German, Russian as well as his native language. Jafet Lindeberg's education would play a key role in his future.

On January 24, 1898, Jafet Lindeberg signed a reindeer-herding contract with the legendary Alaska missionary Sheldon Jackson. That spring he was bound for the Siberian coast to buy more reindeer, but the Siberian native people fought them off and they were forced to return to Alaska empty-handed. After this experience, Lindeberg became convinced that there was more potential in gold prospecting than in reindeer herding.

Lindeberg had met a fellow Norwegian-American named Dr. A.N. Kittlesen who sent him to the village of Council to prospect the area. It was in Council that he met Brynteson and Lindblom, his future mining partners. Together the trio unearthed the jackpot in the Nome area and, thanks to his business wit and his partners mining expertise, they developed the Pioneer Mining Company. This development firmly established Lindeberg's future as a wealthy businessman.

Lindeberg stayed in Nome for many years. He and James Davidson formed the Moonlight Springs Water Works Company at the base of Anvil Mountain. This company supplied fresh, clean water to the newly established city of Nome, and still does to this day.

Lindeberg actively managed the Pioneer Company in Nome, even after marrying into a pioneer Californian family. He spent his summers in Nome, where he looked after the interests of the company, and his winter home was the Palace Hotel in San Francisco. He sold out his share in the Pioneer Mining Company to Wendell P. Hammon in the 1920's. Lindeberg lived a long and prosperous life, he died in San Francisco, California in 1962.

Erik O. Lindblom (1857-1928)

Erik Lindblom was born in Dalarne, Sweden on June 27, 1857. He was the son of a schoolteacher in Stockholm. After the death of his father, his mother became a beggar to support her family. In Stockholm, Lindblom was taught to be a tailor and eventually was able to escape the extreme poverty of his youth. He was able to make enough money to journey to America and arrived in the Bay area of northern California in 1886. While in California, he heard rumors of gold in Alaska and soon gold fever had struck.

On April 27, 1898, he signed on as a sailor on the vessel *Alaska*, commanded by Captain B. Cogan, bound for Kotzebue, Alaska in the vast territory he had heard so much about over the years. His adventures throughout the next few months are legendary. After hearing word that prospectors in the Kotzebue area had not found any promising land, he decided that he would wait for the right opportunity to slip off the ship unnoticed. The *Alaska* became ice bound in Grantly Harbor near Port Clarence, and Lindblom joined a group assigned to retrieve fresh water for the ship. During this excursion, he noticed an ice tunnel formed by a small creek that emptied onto the beach. He waited for the right moment to slip into the tunnel and started making his way through, following the creek upstream. The tunnel was dark and wet, and the way was long, but eventually he made his way through. With great effort, he crawled out of the tunnel and was pleased to see that he could not be seen from the ship.

He knew he had to distance himself from the ship and walked for three days, until he happened upon a lone prospector who advised that he go back in the direction from which he had come. The prospector told him that “His bones would bleach in the mountains if he persisted in the attempt to cross the country to Golovin Bay.”, the rivers were flooded and the tundra was barren and could not provide food. He heeded the advice of the wise prospector and began to make his way back to Port Clarence. When he came near the Harbor, the *Alaska* was still there and he could see that part of the crew was searching for him. He found that a local Eskimo, named Promarshuk, was leaving for Golovin in his umiak loaded with a cargo of furs. Lindblom rode out of the area hiding under the pelts of fur, nearly suffocating in the process and becoming ill from the smell of the furs. The umiak sailed close to the *Alaska*, but Lindblom managed to stay out of sight from the keen eye of Captain Cogan. During their journey, Promarshuk stopped at the mouth of the Snake River, which is present day Nome. Lindblom panned for gold at the mouth of Dry Creek, and found color in his pan.

On July 27, 1898, Lindblom arrived at Dexter’s Trading Post in Golovin. He went to work prospecting for the gold-struck missionary, Hultberg, at Ophir Creek in the district of Council, Alaska. Lindblom met Brynteson, and prospected at Mystery Creek, also in the district of Council. Jafet Lindeberg had been prospecting on the Casadepaga and the Niukluk Rivers, near the district of Council as well, and Brynteson and Lindblom met him there. Soon there after, the trio were on their way to the mouth of the Snake River in a hastily constructed sailboat. On September 22, 1898, they made the first major discovery of gold in the Nome district. Lindblom's portion of the gold taken from the Discovery Claim on Anvil Creek one year later, in 1899, totaled \$100,000. They took yet more gold from Snow Gulch the same year.

The three “Lucky Swedes” formed the Pioneer Mining Company and Lindblom continued, for many years, as an active partner. He eventually moved to Oakland, California where he purchased and operated the Claremont Hotel. He also entered successful mining ventures in both California and Mexico. He did return, for a short time, to Sweden. However, he was banished and forced to return to the United States after he was accused, probably falsely, of failing to support his widowed mother. He returned to California and lived the rest of his life as a well-known and honored citizen. He died in 1928.